



# Cook County Commission on Human Rights

## Cook County Renters Rights and Landlord Protections

### RESIDENTIAL TENANT LANDLORD ORDINANCE SUMMARY

This is a summary of the RTLO Ordinance. The landlord must attach this Summary when offering a rental agreement and at any offering for renewal. If it is not provided, you may let the landlord know that they have 2 days to provide it. If the landlord does not, a renter may terminate their lease.

### WHAT RENTAL UNITS ARE COVERED BY THE RTLO? (Sec. 42-802)

All rental units are subject to the anti-lockout provisions. For all other regulations, almost all rental units in suburban Cook County are included (including mobile homes and subsidized units) except:

- Units in owner occupied buildings with six or fewer units
- Units in hotels, motels, rooming houses, unless rent is paid on a monthly basis and unit is occupied for more than 32 days
- School dormitory rooms, shelters, employee's quarters, non-residential rental properties, and owner-occupied co-ops

A single-family home or condominium if (1) the owner is only renting that one rental property, and (2) the owner or an immediate family member has lived in the home within the year

**BUT:** If the residence is in an exempted unit, the landlord must notify a prospective tenant whether they are excluded from the Ordinance before accepting any fees.

**IMPORTANT:** This is a summary of the Residential Tenant Landlord Ordinance (RTLO). You should review the Ordinance if you have questions. You may want to consult with an attorney, an advocacy organization, or a professional association before making important decisions.

You can get a copy of the Ordinance at <https://cook-county.legistar.com>. You can find this summary translated in multiple languages on the Department of Human Rights website.

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## LOCKOUTS PROHIBITED (Sec. 42-813)

This section applies to every residential rental unit. There are no exceptions.

- A landlord may not change or remove the locks, remove doors of a rental unit, cut off heat, utility or water service, remove tenant's personal property, or interfere with the tenant's use of the apartment.

**REMEDY:** The tenant may sue the landlord to get back into the unit, attorney's fees, and damages (twice the actual damages or 2 months' rent, whichever is greater).

## WHAT ARE THE TENANT'S RIGHTS? (Sec. 42-805)

The tenant has the right to:

- A "habitable" unit and property maintained in compliance with the relevant building codes (Sec. 42-805(C))
- Adequate heat
- 48-hour notice before the landlord enters the unit except in emergencies
- A home free of bedbugs
- General rules, which must be in writing, about the tenant's use and occupancy of the unit.

## WHAT DOES THE TENANT HAVE A RIGHT TO KNOW? (Sec. 42-805)

The landlord must disclose certain information to the tenant:

- The owner's or manager's name, address, and telephone number, including when there is a change of ownership
- Estimated or average utility costs for the past 12 months paid by the tenant to the landlord or utility company, if known by the landlord
- If the property has had any building code violations in the last year
- If a municipality or other utility company threatens to cut off utility service
- If the property has any known lead hazards
- If the landlord has or gets a foreclosure notice.

**REMEDY:** If the landlord does not disclose this information, the tenant must give the landlord a notice of 2 business days and wait to see if the landlord provides the information. If not, the tenant may be able to end the rental agreement.

## WHAT CAN BE INCLUDED IN A LEASE? (Sec. 42-804)

A written or verbal lease agreement may not include certain provisions, including:

- Giving up rights to notices (like a 5-day notice)
- Giving up the right to a jury trial

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- Preventing the tenant from saying negative statements about the landlord
- Requiring the tenant to give a longer amount of notice for moving than the landlord gives the tenant for not renewing the lease
- Letting the landlord apply rent payments to other costs that the landlord charges to the tenant (like utilities)
- Setting late fees of more than \$10 if the rent is \$1000 or below and more than \$10 plus 5% for any amount of rent over \$1000
- Requiring the tenant to pay attorney's fees in an eviction case.

## WHAT CAN THE TENANT DO IF THE LANDLORD DOES NOT MAINTAIN THE UNIT? (Sec. 42-806)

The tenant must give the landlord a written notice and time to make repairs. If the landlord does not make repairs after notice of 14 days, the tenant may:

- Hold back a reasonable portion of rent to reflect the reduced value of the unit;
- Make minor repairs costing less than the greater of \$500.00 or one-half month's rent and submit receipts to the landlord to deduct that cost from rent
- End the lease when severe violations are present and vacate within 30 days
- File a court case for damages and injunctive relief
- In case of a fire or other disaster, find another place to stay and end the lease.

**BUT:** A tenant may not use these remedies if the tenant or guest caused the condition.

## WHAT CAN THE TENANT DO IF THE LANDLORD FAILS TO PROVIDE ESSENTIAL SERVICES (HEAT, RUNNING OR HOT WATER, ELECTRICITY, GAS, OR PLUMBING)? (Sec. 42-806(D))

If the landlord fails to correct the condition after the tenant gives written notice, the tenant may:

After 24 hours –

- 1) Withhold a reasonable portion of rent to reflect the reduced value of the unit
- 2) Get services, and internet if the lease requires it, and deduct costs from rent after giving receipts to the landlord
- 3) Recover damages and reasonable attorney fees or
- 4) Make landlord pay for substitute housing until condition fixed.

After 72 hours –

- 1) End rental agreement and
- 2) Vacate unit within 30 days.

**BUT:** The tenant may not exercise this remedy if the tenant or utility supplier caused the condition.

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## WHAT ARE TENANT'S DUTIES UNDER THE ORDINANCE? (Sec. 42-807)

The tenant, the tenant's family, and invited guests must:

- Comply with the obligations imposed on tenants by relevant municipal codes
- Keep their unit safe, use appliances in a safe manner, dispose of their garbage, and not deliberately damage or remove any property
- Not disturb the other tenants
- Allow reasonable access to the unit with landlord notice of, for example, routine and emergency maintenance, unit inspections and to show the unit
- Notify the landlord in writing within 48 hours of seeing bed bugs.

## WHAT ARE THE LANDLORD'S RIGHTS? (Sec. 42-808)

The landlord may adopt reasonable rules and regulations for the safety of their property and the convenience of co-located tenants. Landlords must provide a copy of the rules and regulations before the tenant moves in. If the landlord adopts the rules after the tenant moves in, the new rules do not apply to the tenant until the tenant agrees in writing.

## CAN THE LANDLORD ACCESS A UNIT? (Sec. 42-808(B))

- A tenant must allow reasonable access to enter the unit if the landlord gives 2 days' notice by mail, telephone, written notice or other means designed in good faith to provide notice.
- A landlord may give a general notice to all tenants if the landlord needs to make a repair on common areas or in other nearby units.
- The landlord may enter the unit without prior notice if emergency or repairs require access immediately. If emergency access was necessary, the landlord must provide tenant with notice of entry within 2 days after the emergency entry.
- Otherwise, the landlord should enter at reasonable times (8:00 AM – 8:00 PM or at tenant's request).

A tenant landlord may enter the rental unit to:

- Inspect the premises as required by a government agency
- Make necessary repairs, alterations, improvements where access is required.
- Supply necessary services
- Show the unit to a prospective purchasers or workmen
- Show the dwelling unit to prospective tenants within 60 days of the expiration of the rental agreement.

**REMEDY:** If the landlord makes an unlawful or unreasonable entry, repeatedly demands entry, or makes the tenant feel harassed, the tenant may file suit and recover 1 month's rent or twice the damages, whichever is greater, and attorney's fees.

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## WHAT IF THE TENANT VIOLATES THE LEASE? (Sec. 42-809)

**LATE RENT.** If the tenant pays rent late, the landlord can charge a late fee. If the tenant does not pay rent, the landlord may give the tenant a 5-day notice.

- Late fees are capped at \$10 for the first \$1,000 — after that, late fees are 5% of the overall rent.

### REMEDY:

- The tenant has the right to pay the back rent during the 5-day notice. If the tenant does not pay, the landlord can file an eviction.
- The tenant still has the right to pay the rent and certain additional costs after the landlord has filed an eviction case. If rent and fees are paid in full, then the landlord must dismiss the case. The tenant can only “pay and stay” and cause the landlord to dismiss a court case 1 time.

## OTHER LEASE VIOLATIONS

If the tenant violates the lease in a material way other than not paying rent, the landlord may give the tenant a 10-day notice.

**REMEDY:** The tenant has the right to fix the problem within the 10 days. If the landlord accepts the rent due or does not file an eviction 30 days after giving either a 5-day or a 10-day notice, then the landlord cannot file an eviction case.

**OTHER NON-RENEWAL.** The landlord needs to give the tenant a 60-day notice to renew or end the lease.

**REMEDY:** If the landlord does not give a 60-day notice, the tenant may stay for 120 days after written notice is given. During this time, the terms and conditions of the lease stay the same.

## WHAT HAPPENS IF THE LANDLORD THINKS THE TENANT HAS ABANDONED THE UNIT? (Sec. 42-809(B)(2))

If the landlord believes that the tenant has abandoned the unit, the landlord can try to rent it to someone else. The landlord may decide that the tenant has abandoned the unit only if the tenant:

- Gave the landlord written notice that the tenant has abandoned the unit, or
- Has not been in the unit for 32 days, removed their property, and not paid rent.

If the landlord believes that the tenant has abandoned possessions in the unit, the landlord needs to hold onto the property and determine its value.

- For property without value: Throw away after 7 days without notice.
- For property with value: Give tenant written notice to remove property within 7 days. Landlord may sell the property and keep the proceeds for the tenant. The landlord may keep the money if the tenant does not claim it within 1 year.

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## CAN THE LANDLORD ACCEPT SUBLEASES? (Sec. 42-809)

The landlord should accept reasonable subleases.

If a tenant moves prior to the end of the rental agreement, the landlord must make a good faith effort to find a new tenant at a fair rent.

**BUT:** If the landlord is unsuccessful in re-renting the unit, the tenant remains liable for the rent, as well as the landlord's cost of advertising.

## WHAT ARE THE REQUIREMENTS FOR MOVE-IN FEES? (Sec. 42-804)

A landlord may charge a move-in fee, but must:

- Charge a move-in fee only that is reasonable and related to the cost of the tenant moving in
- Give an estimate of the move-in fee which includes detail of the landlord's cost of the tenant moving in
- Not change the name of a fee or deposit to get around these rules.

## WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE TENANT THINKS THE LANDLORD IS RETALIATING? (Sec. 42-812)

The tenant has the right to complain or speak publicly about their tenancy to governmental agencies or officials, police, media, community groups, tenant unions or the landlord.

The landlord cannot retaliate by terminating or threatening to end a lease, increasing rent, decreasing services, bringing or threatening to bring an eviction action, or refusing to renew a lease agreement in reaction to a tenant making a complaint.

The tenant may claim retaliation as a defense to an eviction or as a case against the landlord and shall receive damages and attorney's fees if the tenant succeeds.

**BUT:** The landlord may still end a lease or increase rent if the landlord has a legitimate reason to do so that is not related to any complaints by the tenant. The landlord may rebut the tenant's retaliation claim from 1-year prior by proving a legitimate, non-retaliatory basis for the conduct. A landlord's behavior is not retaliatory if a code violation was caused by the tenant, family member of the tenant, or guest of the tenant. If a tenant makes a complaint of retaliation after the notice of a rent increase, there will not be a presumption of retaliation.

### FREE LEGAL ASSISTANCE:

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## WHAT ARE THE SECURITY DEPOSIT REQUIREMENTS? (Sec. 42-811)

A landlord may charge a security deposit, but must:

- Charge no more than 1.5 times monthly rent for security deposit
- Give a receipt for a security deposit that provides the owner's name, the date it was received and a description of the dwelling unit. It must be signed by the person accepting the security deposit, unless the tenant pays the security deposit by electronic funds transfer, then landlord may give an electronic receipt
- Hold all security deposits in a federally insured account in an Illinois financial institution separate from the landlord's other accounts
- Tell the tenant in writing the name of the financial institution where the landlord will deposit the security deposit
- Inform the tenant of the new account if the landlord transfers the security deposit into a new account
- Return the security deposit within 30 days after the tenant moves out
- Only keep money from the security deposit if the tenant owes rent or court fees, if the landlord has gone to court (but not attorney's fees) or for reasonable costs that the landlord has paid for the repair of the unit (but not costs for "ordinary wear and tear")
- Provide a detailed explanation of the costs within 30 days if the landlord has kept money from the security deposit for repair
- Be responsible to return the security deposit if the landlord sells the property until the first landlord gives the money to the second landlord and gives the tenant written notice; then the second landlord is responsible for the security deposit.

**REMEDY:** If the landlord charges too much for security deposit, does not return the security deposit, or does not give the tenant proof of the expenses for any repairs deducted from the security deposit, the tenant may sue the landlord and shall receive damages equal to 2 times the security deposit plus attorney's fees.

If the landlord makes a mistake with the paperwork on the security deposit, the tenant must first give the landlord a notice and wait 2 business days to see if the landlord corrects the paperwork. If the paperwork is not corrected, the tenant may sue the landlord.

If the landlord does not give the proper receipt for the security deposit, the tenant is entitled to the immediate return of the security deposit.